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Letter dated 22 March 2006 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

I am writing to follow up on my report on the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) of 3 January 2006 (S/2006/2), in which I requested the Security Council to approve an increase in the Operation's strength by four battalions, three formed police units and 100 police officers, in order to enhance the mission's capacity to protect itself and to effectively support the implementation of the remaining tasks under the peace agreements, which are critical to the organization of the elections in October 2006.

In its resolution 1652 (2006), the Security Council took note of my report and expressed its intention to keep under review the tasks and troop levels of UNOCI, and specifically to review them when the Council considers my forthcoming report on the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), taking into account the situations in both Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia. In that regard, I would like to bring to the attention of the Council recent developments in the political process in Côte d'Ivoire which, in my view, call for a reinforcement of UNOCI beyond the interim arrangements under which the Security Council approved the temporary emergency transfer of one infantry company from UNMIL to UNOCI.

Over the past few weeks, the Ivorian parties have taken some important steps towards moving the peace process forward. Prime Minister Charles Konan Banny has confirmed that his Government has taken full ownership of the road map for the peace process developed by the International Working Group. To that end, on 9 February he convened a workshop of national stakeholders during which the mechanisms to spearhead the implementation of the road map have been identified. The workshop was followed by an important meeting between President Laurent Gbagbo, former President Henri Konan Bédié, former Prime Minister Alassane Ouattara and Guillaume Soro, Secretary-General of the Forces nouvelles, which the Prime Minister convened in Yamoussoukro on 28 February.

During that meeting, the five leaders agreed that the dialogue between the Forces armées nationales de Côte d'Ivoire (FANCI) and the Chiefs of Staff of the Forces nouvelles should resume immediately to prepare the disarmament process; that the identification and electoral processes would be conducted concomitantly; and that the Independent Electoral Commission should be reconstituted on the basis of a balanced representation of the political forces.

Subsequently, on 7 March, the members of the Independent Electoral Commission were sworn into office, and a framework for conducting the

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identification and voter registration processes was submitted to the cabinet, thus setting the stage for those crucial aspects of the peace process to begin in earnest.

Other significant positive developments include the recent conduct of school examinations in the northern part of Côte d'Ivoire for the first time since the outbreak of the conflict and the arrival of the leader of the Forces nouvelles, Guillaume Soro, in Abidjan on 14 March, to take up his post in the Government of Prime Minister Banny.

The preceding important developments have set in motion a fledgling process which, if sustained, could put the peace process properly on track. It is, therefore, crucial for UNOCI to be adequately reinforced, in a timely manner, to enable it to support fully the implementation of the road map, thus making it feasible to organize the elections by October 2006. In this regard, UNOCI should be prepared to fully support the process, including in the area of security. I therefore appeal to the Security Council to approve the recommendations contained in my report (S/2006/2).

Despite the above-mentioned encouraging developments, the security situation remains precarious and could degenerate very quickly, especially in Abidjan and in the western part of Côte d'Ivoire. It is imperative, therefore, to ensure that in the delicate period ahead the credibility of UNOCI or the peace process itself is not challenged. Furthermore, I am concerned that any unravelling of the security situation in Côte d'Ivoire could spill over into Liberia.

I should be grateful if you would bring the present letter to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Kofi A. **Annan**